

VOICES *of* VETERANS

TEXAS VETERANS LAND BOARD

Spring 2014



Veteran Spotlight



Clark Hitt

Thousands of Texans fought in WWII and did so in every clime and place. Mr. Clark Hitt was one Texan who defied the normal expectations. Despite being reared in Lancaster, Texas he joined the Army as a snow trooper in the 10th Mountain Division and became skilled at skiing. He would go on to fight at the famous Battle of Hill 913, the one in which Sen. Bob Dole was seriously injured, and earned a

Purple Heart for wounds he received in combat. Mr. Hitt now resides in Sweetwater, Texas and recently shared his memories with the Texas Voices of Veterans Oral History Program.

Here are some portions of that interview.

On joining the 10th Mountain Division –

"It intrigued me and it was something different. I had guys in the Marines, I had a guy in the Air Force, some of them were pill rollers, you know, in the medics, and I just wanted to be in something different and I don't know why."

On learning to ski –

"I can't really say it was easy for me. It was kind of embarrassing when other guys knew how to ski and here I was kind of just trying to stay on my feet. No, I never did become a great, a good skier even I guess, but all the Army was interested in was getting from point A to point B. And we had some pretty good ski instructors. Most of them were just guys that joined the 10th and could ski, but I never was an outstanding skier, maybe average, but I could load up, saddle up as we said. It was extremely difficult. Up there at Camp Hale, we had almost no vehicles. We had mules."

My Fellow Veterans:

Five generations of my family have served in times of war. As a former Marine and Vietnam veteran, I know every veteran has a story to tell. The Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans™ program wants to preserve as many of these important oral histories as possible. Through these stories of bravery, fear and fellowship, future generations of Texans can learn lessons not found in any textbook—like what it means to sacrifice for a cause greater than yourself, and how to face adversity against great odds. Free to any Texas veteran, the Voices of Veterans™ program provides a lasting legacy for historians, friends and family members, and helps us to honor and remember the sacrifices of all Texas veterans.



Semper Fi,

Jerry
JERRY PATTERSON,
Chairman
Texas Veterans
Land Board

VOICESOFVETERANS.ORG ★ 800.252.VETS

WHY ORAL HISTORY?



Nothing is more powerful than the spoken word. Imagine if we could listen to the stories of heroes such as David Crockett, Sam Houston, and Stephen F. Austin in their own words.

Thanks to digital technology, we can now record the special memories of today's heroes and share them with future generations of Texans.

"The Voices of Veterans program serves as a living monument to honor the sacrifices of all veterans."

Military history often highlights stories of major battles, equipment or famous leaders. Yet, the stories of

the men and women on the frontlines are often overlooked. Stories of courage, fear, fellowship and inspiration are lost with every passing year.

The Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans program wants to record these stories to remind future Texans that ordinary men and women, when faced with adversity, can accomplish extraordinary things. The Voices of Veterans program serves as a living monument to honor the sacrifices of all veterans.

On arriving in Italy –

"We got on up there, they trucked us on up more towards the front, and we began to see along the road just stacks after stacks of artillery shells that you began to realize, we're about to get into a war here. But I felt sorry for the Italian people. Women walking around in the snow with no stockings on at all, just wearing a wooden, some shoes that they had made, and little kids begging. It

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... and there was a German kid that was on the same ambulance with me that was pretty badly wounded, and they took care of him, too ...

”

—Clark Hitt



made you realize how well off we were, and of course we were warm more or less, and these people, many of them were cold and their houses had been blown up."

Serving with Bob Dole –

"That mountain was 913 meters high above sea level, which of course is three times that in feet, but incidentally, that's where

Senator Bob Dole was wounded. He'd been a replacement officer in our battalion, he was in another company. I've met him since the war and I've corresponded with him a time or two, but I didn't know him during the war. There's a plaque there today, put there by the Italians, where he was really severely wounded."

On being injured during the Battle of Hill 913 -

"The Germans were firing down at us and they were firing small rounds of mortar shells at us. They had started coming in and I hit the ground and I got a piece of shrapnel in my jaw, and it wasn't life threatening, but the captain told me to help. There was an officer there who had been wounded, and he told me to help him back up to where one of our medics was back up on top of the hill. So, I did that and that's where he put a bandage on me, wrapped it tight and stopped the bleeding. I was bleeding pretty bad. Then I went back down where we had come up the day before and taken the mountain, and back there was a house and in the basement they set up. The medics had set up a first aid station there. I got there about nine in the morning and it was about three that afternoon before they got an ambulance, and took the severe ones out first and I went back and they took me all the way to the hospital.

I got there about five that afternoon and then they did surgery on me that night. They told me later about one o'clock. But when I got there, to tell you how I felt, I was kind of woozy and there was a German kid that was on the same ambulance with me that was pretty badly wounded, and they took care of him, too... They put



Memorial at Tennessee Pass, Colorado honoring the 999 servicemen from the 10th Mountain Division killed during WWII.

me in a bed and I remember this American nurse that came to my bedside, and had a basin, a pan of warm water, and she took the bandage off and cleaned my face up a little bit, and I know I was as ready to die at that moment as I have ever been since. Then I remember them waking me up when I went into surgery and then the next thing I remember was about nine o'clock the next morning, and one of my friends, a fellow named Englebert that had pretty well lost a lot of his lip just below his nose, a piece of shrapnel hit him, he was hollering at me from the other end of the ward, and it was good to see somebody that I knew."

His reflections on the war –

"Well, like we owe it to the guys who fought in the Revolutionary War and the Civil War and other wars that this country's fought, that it's the freedom that we have and the rights that we have in this country that need to be perpetuated from here on out. There's a lot of guys that paid the full, the ultimate price and gave their life, that we need to remember them, we need to remember what they did. One kid that was wounded, was killed soon after, that I didn't know until I got back with the company, and I missed him,



Clark Hitt, center, at a plaque to Senator Bob Dole at the site where he was wounded at the Battle of Hill 913 in Italy.

and I remember asking what happened to Clancy, and they told me that he was killed there not too long after I was wounded. I think of him often and I've gone to his grave every time I've been back over there, and have pictures of it. I don't know how many were killed, but this country is worth fighting for."

How It Works

1

Complete and mail the screening form at the end of this newsletter.

Let us know you're ready to tell your story.

2

Introduction by phone.

When we get your contact info, our staff will call to chat about your story. This helps us organize our work and lets us know more about you.

3

Set an interview date.

Once approved, the staff will work with you and our volunteer interviewer to pick the best day for your interview.

4

Tell your story.

Either by phone or in person, a typical Voices of Veterans interview lasts 1 to 2 hours.

5

Add pictures if you want.

Please feel free to send us copies of wartime photos, documents or other memorabilia to enrich your story.

6

Proof your interview.

You will have a chance to review and edit the transcript of your interview for accuracy. We want to get it right.

7

Get your story on CD.

You will receive a free transcript and 4 free audio CDs of your interview, along with a frameable certificate.

"... their favorite trick was, if you refused to answer, you got two options. One, they would take out their Luger, put it on the desk and say we have ways to make you answer ..."

Andrew Bardagjy, USN

POW on interrogation by Nazi SS recorded 2 December, 2008

"I found these people and they had on a German uniform with a gun. Of course we just threw our hands up ... and they didn't want us. I saw that Chetnik emblem on his cap and I said well, we're among friends."

Donald Landrum, USAAF

Shot down over Nazi territory recorded 17 April, 2008

"Well, being a Christian, it was bad to think about trying to kill someone, but if somebody's shooting at you, you know good and well you're going to shoot back ... and that way were doing a duty, we thought, to the country ..."

Roy Goad, U.S. Army

Awarded the Silver Star recorded 8 January, 2008

"I know one of the guys asked me one time ... was you ever scared? I said yeah, one time. I said I was scared from the time that first damn bomb hit, until the end of the war when I got home. That's just about the way it was ..."

Albert Kamenicky, USN

Pearl Harbor survivor recorded 2 December, 2008



Bill Meier

Veteran Spotlight

Born on a farm in Manor, Texas, Bill Meier was 22 years old when he enlisted in the U.S. Army during WWII. He would go on to see extensive combat throughout Europe and was shot by a German sniper. Mr. Meier recently passed away, but his words and memories live on from

this interview he gave to the Texas Voices of Veterans Oral History

Program. It was our honor to have known him.

Following are portions of his interview.

On arriving in Europe –

I went to the 78th Lightning Division. Well, I was assigned to a light machine gun section, which is 11 men, and we never had over six. As fast as they came, they got hit or something. Couldn't get replacements in fast enough. So I was carrying ammunition for the machine gun, I don't know how long, a week or two. Then I carried the gun for a week or two. And then somebody got hit, and I was assigned as a leader of that machine gun section. That's what I was doing when I got hit.

On his first combat action at the Roer River dams –

Well, that was when they were first straightening out the Battle of the Bulge, and the next project was the Roer River, swarming all down on the Roer River, and that was the first big battle I got into, to try to secure that dam before the Germans blew it. They were trying to blow it. Our men got there and cut all the wire. And they blew part of it, but not enough to damage the dam that much. It took a while to take that thing because they were fighting to hold it, for maybe a week at the most. The main thing I remember about that was line patrol. It must've been probably 200 or 300 yards from the dam, and so down to the dam and back at night, to make sure nobody was coming to our side, and that's a scary thing to do. I was on the point there. You heard every twig snap and everything else. I hope I don't run into anybody. I hope somebody don't start shooting.



On coming to the aide of a pinned down unit –

We had gotten to the first superhighway, and we were set up there and ready for the Germans coming back, trying to take it, and I only had three men with me at the time. We hit the old coal mine. They had a barracks there that the Germans used, stacked with rifles and ammunition, nobody in there, and B Company called and said we're pinned down over here. We need help. I took a rifleman, myself, a machine gunner, and a BAR man. We went up out of this coal mine, walked up this road, the road was down, with trees and stuff on either side, and got up to where it was only about six feet I guess to the top. I told the machine gunner, I said get up right over there, put your backpack down, and then start firing. He did and the BAR man said I don't want in on this. I said get on your knees just above him. He stood up. He didn't get to pull the trigger, he got shot. The machine gunner had already been firing quite a bit, and I could see probably 200 yards down the road the Germans were moving back across the road, so I don't want to get hit, and when the BAR man got hit, I said let's get out of here. It was just enough to get B Company out, and we helped B Company out of that.

On being shot by a German sniper –

A few days later we were at the super highway, set up a machine gun, in case there was any Germans coming back, and our mess hall and first aid had moved up close to us, so I only had two guys with me. I sent them back to eat, and I stayed with the gun. I was reading the Stars and Stripes newspaper that we had. I was laying up against the stump of a tree reading that paper when I got hit. He was about 250 yards away. He was in a house in the middle of the town . . . (It) knocked the breath out of me. Of course I had shock and couldn't get my breath. The guy that dug in with me came back pretty quick and found me and called for the medics . . . They finally cut all the clothes enough to find where I was hit, and doctored it, put me on a stretcher, and at that time they laid the windshield down on a Jeep and put you on top. They put me on that going back to the aid station and shells started falling in the sky and then the Jeep stopped in a hole, and I was like . . . I couldn't do anything.

Upon returning home after the war –

I came back to Austin looking for a job. I got a job at Safeway grocery store, training to be a manager, and had some friends of ours who said why don't you take the exam for the post office? I did, and they called me just before Christmas, quarter to six, to go to work at the post office. I said is it permanent? No, it's just temporary. I said well I don't want it. Then I went to work first day of February '47 . . . (and stayed there) 32 years.

If you know a veteran with a story to tell please have them call 800.252.VETS.





I WANT TO TELL MY STORY.

In order to help us learn more about you and your service record, please complete this screening form to the best of your knowledge. Thank you.

(Mr.) (Mrs.)

Your Name

(Mr.) (Mrs.)

Spouse or Other Contact Name

Street Address

City

State

Zip Code

Home Phone

Cell Phone

Other Phone

FAX

Email address

Service Branch:

Last Rank:

to

Dates of Service (e.g., 1946 to 1951)

Conflict / Theater of Operations

Significant Battles / Missions

Awards / Medals

Significant Battles / Missions

Awards / Medals

Other Items of Interest

Please mail form to:
Texas Veterans Land Board, P.O. Box 12873, Austin TX 78711-2873.
Or you may fax it to 512.475.1415.
Call 800-252-VETS (8387) for more info.